



Like Berkeley and Santa Cruz?

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, April 28, 2008

City Hall Diary

Berkeley and Santa Cruz have a reputation of voting on proclamations or supporting causes that are outside their domains, such as the independence of Tibet, the genocide in Darfur, and federal issues like immigration or going to war. Topics like these are worthy of discussion on a blog, in person, or for our elected officials in Washington DC. However, is it the best use of time dealing with these at a level where you have limited influence instead of spending time on what you can really make an impact on? Like the "City" Council meetings?

Last week we were asked to support certain federal bills. These bills start one way and then end up out in left field, and before you know it, you are supporting a bill that has a pork barrel amendment that is paying for a bridge in Alaska.

One particular bill was on immigration—a program for people from another country being able to live and work in the US. (I do acknowledge that a sizable portion of our agricultural labor is made up of non-US citizens.) My job as a council member gives me plenty to do already, and having to read through federal legislation on top of it is too time consuming. The city does not have a role in immigration or agriculture. These are issues that must be dealt with at the national level. I do believe in supporting legislation that directly impacts the city, such as transportation legislation with dollars tied to a Santa Clara County project, for example.

In discussing the immigration bill at the council, it was said that it would help with the escalating food prices we have seen locally. Actually, food prices are rising globally and it has little to do with farm labor. We have seen riots break out over food in Haiti, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Senegal, and Cameroon, where 24 people died. In fact, hoarding rice in the Philippines is now punishable by life in prison! Prices for rice since January have soared 141 percent, and prices of other grains have also risen sharply.

The reasons for price increases are the growing affluent populations of China and India, who are eating more grains and meat, as well as using grains for biofuels like ethanol, quotas and tariffs that restrict trade, and the USDA paying farmers not to plant crops on their land.

Whatever the reasons, I just don't see it as my main focus on the council to spend 30 minutes peeling back the onion on all the nuances and amendments in a single federal bill that does not have a direct impact on San Jose. I remember as a candidate filling out questionnaires for organizations that asked me federal questions, and I would write in "N/A" or "bogus."

NOTE: If you happen to be reading this on Monday, April 28, there are three important meetings that deal directly with San Jose tonight. One is the General Plan 2040 which will be discussing water and population growth; another is the 3-Year General Fund Structural Deficit Elimination Plan Stakeholder Group; and, finally, the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force. Public comment is welcome at all the meetings.

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, April 28, 2008